

Remarks Following a Meeting With Military Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

January 26, 2007

The President. I just had a full briefing with General David Petraeus about the way forward in Iraq. I want to thank the Secretary and General Pace, National Security Adviser for joining this discussion. Congratulations.

Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus. Thank you, sir.

The President. The Senate confirmed this good man without a dissenting vote. I appreciate the quick action of the United States Senate. I appreciate them giving General David Petraeus a fair hearing, and I appreciate the vote. My instructions to the general is: Get over to the zone as quickly as possible and implement a plan that we believe will yield our goals.

I thank the general and his family. I particularly want to thank your family for supporting you and supporting our Nation. One of the amazing things about our country is that we've got military folks who volunteer to go into a tough zone to protect the American people from future harm, and they've got families who stand by them. And whether you be a general or a private in the military, there is a U.S.—there's a family member saying, "I love you, and I support you."

And so, General, I congratulate you, and I congratulate the volunteers and their families for making the hard decisions necessary to protect its people from a grave danger. And you're going into an important battle in this war on terror, and I give you my full support and wish you Godspeed.

Lt. Gen. Petraeus. Thank you, Mr. President. If I could thank the Senate as well, thank my family, and above all, thank those great soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and civilians who are out there on the frontlines of the global war on terror.

The President. All right. I'll answer a couple of questions. Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press].

War on Terror Strategy

Q. Thank you, sir. The other night in your State of the Union Address, you asked Congress to give your plan a chance. But law-

makers, Democrats and Republicans, didn't really miss a step in starting to turn out resolutions against that plan. Why do you think it's okay to go ahead without their support?

The President. One of the things I've found in Congress is that most people recognize that failure would be a disaster for the United States. And in that I'm the decision-maker, I had to come up with a way forward that precluded disaster. In other words, I had to think about what's likely to work.

And so I worked with our military and I worked with Secretary Gates to come up with a plan that is likely to succeed. And the implementor of that plan is going to be General Petraeus. And my call to the Congress is, is that I know there is skepticism and pessimism, and that they are—some are condemning a plan before it's even had a chance to work. And they have an obligation and a serious responsibility, therefore, to put up their own plan as to what would work.

I've listened a lot to Members of Congress. I've listened carefully to their suggestions. And I have picked the plan that I think is most likely to succeed, because I understand, like many in Congress understand, success is very important for the security of the country.

Let's see—Steven [Steve Holland, Reuters], yes, sir.

Iraq/Iran

Q. Yes, sir. This policy of going after the Iranians inside Iraq, are you concerned that that could be a provocative act in the region?

The President. I made it very clear, as did the Secretary, that our policy is going to be to protect our troops in Iraq. It just makes sense that if somebody is trying to harm our troops or stop us from achieving our goal or killing innocent citizens in Iraq, that we will stop them. That's an obligation we all have, is to protect our folks and achieve our goal.

Now, some are trying to say that because we're enforcing—helping ourselves in Iraq by stopping outside influence from killing our soldiers or hurting Iraqi people, that we

want to expand this beyond the borders. That's a presumption that simply is not accurate. We believe that we can solve our problems with Iran diplomatically and are working to do that. As a matter of fact, we're making pretty good progress on that front. As you know, the Iranians, for example, think they want to have a nuclear weapon. And we've convinced other nations to join us to send a clear message, through the United Nations, that that's unacceptable behavior.

And so, yes, we're going to continue to protect ourselves in Iraq and, at the same time, work to solve our problems with Iran diplomatically. And I believe we can succeed. The choice is the Iranian Government's choice, see. And one of the things that the Iranian Government has done is, they've begun to isolate their nation to the harm of the Iranian people. And the Iranian people are proud people, and they've got a great history and a great tradition.

Our struggle is not with the Iranian people. As a matter of fact, we want them to flourish, and we want their economy to be strong. And we want their mothers to be able to raise their children in a hopeful society. My problem is with a government that takes actions that end up isolating their people and ends up denying the Iranian people their true place in the world. And so we'll work diplomatically, and I believe we can solve our problems peacefully.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Participating in the meeting were Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; Gen. Peter Pace, USMC, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus, incoming commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; and National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley.

Remarks to the House Republican Conference in Cambridge, Maryland January 26, 2007

Thank you. I appreciate the warm applause. Thank you very much. It's good to be with you again—twice in one week, and I'm better off for it. *[Laughter]* Laura sends her very best to those of you who've run and

won and to your families. I want to say something about the families. I know how hard it is to be in a political family, and I know the sacrifices that the spouse and children make. And so on behalf of a grateful nation, I thank you for standing by your loved one as he or she serves a noble cause, and that is the cause of democracy here in the greatest country on the face of the Earth, the United States.

I am glad to be among friends. I count a lot of you as personal friends. I particularly count the leadership as friends. I've gotten to know John Boehner and Roy Blunt over the past 6 years. I value their friendship; I look forward to working with them. And I know that the Republican Party is in good hands in the House of Representatives with these fine leaders.

I, of course, have known Kay a long time. She and I were blessed, like old Judge Carter, to be raised in Texas. For those of you from Texas, you know what I'm talking about, being blessed to be raised there—for the rest of you, come on down and visit us sometime. *[Laughter]*

I've come to admire Adam Putnam. You call him Adam; I call him "Red." *[Laughter]* But, nevertheless, he is a strong leader and a good friend. I appreciate Tom Cole and Thaddeus McCotter as well. These two gentlemen are new to the leadership, but I'm confident they'll be able to provide a lot of good direction to the caucus. And so I'm looking forward to working with you all, and I appreciate you taking on big responsibilities.

I want to spend a little time talking about the state of the Union. I want to remind you that as a result of our philosophy, this economy of ours is strong. I said to the country the other night, we're a country with low inflation, low unemployment, and increasing wages. We've got people working, and they're putting more money in their pocket. And one of the reasons this economy is strong is because we had the wisdom to cut the taxes on the working people. And we need to keep them low.

I'm looking forward to working with you on balancing the budget. Your old colleague Rob Portman, who is now the head of the OMB, will be submitting a budget that shows